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TAGS: KFLU TBIO SENV ECON EAGR PREL PL

SUBJECT: POLAND AVIAN INFLUENZA UPDATE: CROSS AGENCY
COOPERATION GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

REF: A. A. STATE 209622

- 1B. B. WARSAW 3903
- 1C. C. WARSAW 3830
- 1D. D. WARSAW 3632
- 1E. E. WARSAW 3364
- 1F. F. WARSAW 3212

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11. (SBU) Summary. Econoffs recently discussed GOP contingency preparations for an outbreak of avian influenza (AI) with the Polish Ministry of Health. Polish Health Ministry officials believe that AI is still primarily a threat to Polish agriculture, but stressed that the GOP has planned thoroughly for any AI scenario, including a pandemic.

The GOP's Anti-Pandemic Committee (APC) is responsible for this effort. The APC is composed of officials from several agencies, including the Ministries of Agriculture and Interior. The APC continues to meet frequently to coordinate activity at the national and local levels of government. Though there have not been any reported cases of AI in Poland, Health Ministry officials concede there is little they can do to prevent the disease from crossing into Poland due to migratory habits of birds that summer here. The Embassy's Avian Flu working group met on February 28 and determined that trip wire 2 has not been crossed yet and reviewed Embassy preparedness for that eventuality. End Summary.

The Structure of Cooperation

12. (SBU) Econoffs met with Ministry of Health Under Secretary of State Andrzej Wojtyla and National Health

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Inspectorate (an organ of the Ministry of Health)
Anti-Pandemic Specialist Anna Swiatecka to discuss Polish plans to deal with what most consider an inevitable outbreak of AI in Poland. Wojtyla is the Chair of the GOP's Anti-Pandemic Committee (APC). He noted that one of the legacies of Poland's communist past that has not yet been dismantled is Sanepid stations, or Sanitary-Epidemiology Inspection Offices, of which there is one in each of Poland's 16 voivodships. In addition, there are another 300 sub-offices located at the county (powiat) level. These offices collectively employ over 18,000 workers and are essentially controlled by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture (depending upon the function being performed). The APC has been able to work through these offices, conducting inspections and disseminating information to the remotest periphery of the country. Wojtyla quipped that this legacy of the past provides the GOP with an effective tool to manage sub-national governmental coordination.

13. (SBU) The Ministry of Agriculture and its Veterinary Inspectorate run inspections out of the Sanepid offices, and the Ministry of Health and the National Health Inspectorate are currently using them to spread information about the human dimension of AI. The main goals of the APC at this time are educating hospitals to recognize AI symptoms in humans, and providing information to schools about hygiene and what to do if a child finds a dead bird. The APC is creating informational sheets on these subjects that it will distribute across Poland. A different information sheet is already being distributed at Polish airports to travelers heading to countries where outbreaks of AI have been confirmed. Swiatecka also mentioned that the APC has asked local parish priests (often the centerpiece of Polish village life) to spread information about AI to their congregations. In all cases, the goal is to provide information and forestall panic when AI is inevitably discovered here.

Planning for the Future

14. (SBU) Poland's main veterinary laboratory, located in Pulawy, is rated BSL-3 (bio safety level 3). It is able to detect H5, but not H5N1. Poland currently must rely on labs in London or Germany for tests of this specificity. Wojtyla stated that the APC has been discussing an upgrade of the Pulawy lab, and that the idea has gained support in the GOP. The main obstacles are financing and clarifying which ministry would control the lab. Upgrading the Pulawy facility would cost approximately PLN 16 million. Wojtyla believes both the financing and bureaucratic hurdles can be cleared.

15. (SBU) The APC is preparing for pandemic as best it can by following WHO guidelines. The GOP has ordered Tamiflu shots from Roche, though it expects to wait for another 8-9 months for receipt. The APC is also encouraging Poles to get the generic flu shot, which is now widely available throughout the country (this was not the case a few months ago).

Embassy Preparations

16. (SBU) The DCM convened the embassy Avian Flu working group on February 28 to review embassy preparations for an avian flu outbreak in Poland. The working group determined that we have not yet crossed embassy trip wire 2 -- Bird infection reported in Poland -- but that we expect confirmation of the first case shortly. Preparations for trip wire 2 and 3 were reviewed to ensure that the embassy is prepared to deal with the disease when its existence in Poland is confirmed.

The Best Laid Schemes O' Mice 'An Men

17. (SBU) Comment. The GOP and the Polish populace realize that an AI occurrence is almost an inevitability at this point, with many cases now reported just over the German border. However, from conversations with Wojtyla and Swiatecka, the GOP appears confident that it is as prepared as it can be at this point in time. Wojtyla and Swiatecka also seemed very certain that the APC is conducting its duties effectively. Swiatecka reported a 90% compliance rate with the order to keep domesticated fowl indoors in the Polish province closest to the German outbreak of AI. She noted that the outbreak of cases in bordering countries had made the sense of financial loss more tangible to small farmers. While it is clear that the GOP can not prevent an AI outbreak, the APC, which has been meeting for over a year, is doing its best to safeguard Poland with expertise and preparedness.

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